DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 201 099 EC 132 524

TITLE Alternative Program Handbook. Third Edition.
INSTITUTION State College Area School District, Pa.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 51p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Career Education; Guidelines; *High Schools; *Nontraditional Education; Program Administration; *Program Descriptions; School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Alternative Program PA

ABSTRACT

The handbook describes the Alternative Program (State College, PA), a nontraditional high school which encourages community service and focuses on career education as well as basic academics. Program aspects addressed include goals, philosophy, enrollment, graduation requirements, grading choices, extracurricular activities, and budget. The second section outlines procedures involving attendance, classes at home schools, schedule changes, repeating courses, independent contracts, travel and vacations, extended field trips, credit for service learning, and jobs. The school's policy concerning use of drugs is included. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED201099

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM HANDBOOK

STATE COLLEGE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

STATE COLLEGE, PENNSYLVANIA

THIRD EDITION

1979-80

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Richard J. Lear

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EC132524

INTRODUCTION

This handbook is a reasonably accurate representation of the Alternative Program as of August, 1979. Our program is intentionally small and flexible, and much of our operating procedure is based upon the personal relationships between and among the members of the Alternative Program community. Taken together, these three aspects of our program - small size, flexibility, and personalness - do much to make the Alternative Program a special place to work, learn, and play. They also enable us to operate with fewer rules and less "red tape" than many other schools, which is almost always an advantage. Sometimes, though, things that everyone should know don't get written down, so not everyone has the same understandings, and that causes problems. We hope that the information contained in this handbook will minimize those problems.

It is important to understand, too, that our flexibility, coupled with our desire to have widespread student and parent involvement in all aspects of the A.P., means that our operating procedures and policies can be modified (almost always) if enough members of the A.P. community believe a change would improve our program. That's one part of what being actively involved in the Alternative Program might mean. So, while this handbook was pretty accurate when it was printed in August, some of our ways of operating may change as the year goes by.

You will see that this handbook is divided into two major sections. The first section contains general historical and descriptive information about the Alternative Program. Its intent is to explain the A.P. to parents,

students and others interested in learning about our program. The second section of this handbook contains the policies and procedures by which we operate the Alternative Program on a day-to-day basis. It is intended primarily to serve as a resource for students, parents, and staff who are presently a part of the A.P. Students and parents may wish to keep handy a copy of this handbook to help answer questions which may arise from time to time about the Alternative Program.

Rick Lear
Program Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
SECTION I	1
Alternative Programs and Conventional Schools	1
History of the Alternative Program	2
Philosophy	4
Goals	6
Program Governance and Decision-making	8
Kinds of Students	10
Enrollment	10
Student Commitment	11
Parent Commitment	11
Staff	12
Counseling teams	13
Clumps	14
Community Service	14
Career Education	15
School Calendar	15
Sex Fairness	16
Graduation Requirements	16
Ways to Earn Credit	17
Grading Choices	18
College Entrance	18
Vo-Tech	19
Extra-Curricular Activities	19
Budget	20

TABLE OF CONTENTS CONTINUED

Page

Transportation 20
Lunch 20
Student Responsibilities 21
SECTION II 23
Attendance 24
Classes at Home Schools 26
Schedule Changes 27
Repeating Courses 28
Independent Contracts 30
Student Travel and Vacations 32
Extended Field Trips 33
Credit for Service Learning 35
Jobs 36
Letter About Policies 37
Drug Policy 38

SECTION I

Alternative Programs and Conventional Schools

In recent decades, educational research has begun to substantiate what people have recognized for thousands of years at an intuitive or experiential level: there are many healthful ways for individuals to grow and learn. With this recognition that many acceptable modes of learning exist has come the acknowledgment that school programs need not be the same to be good.

Many school districts throughout the country now offer a variety of optional schools and programs from which students and parents — and teachers — may choose. These optional schools and programs take many different forms, and may at times appear to be at odds with conventional schools. And differences do indeed exist, sometimes at a philosophical level, sometimes at the level of structures and processes established to achieve goals. We were conceived to be a small and flexible program, for instance, and our size both allows and calls for us to operate in a fashion different from larger schools. But there is a common ground as well. Some, perhaps much, of our philosophy is similar to that of many conventional schools. We most certainly share some common goals with conventional schools, though we have perhaps a different emphasis. Some of our structures and processes mirror those which exist in conventional schools. Most importantly, in spite of differences, a common purpose binds alternative and conventional schools together: both exist to help release the full human potential of the students who inhabit them.

The description of our Alternative Program and its philosophy, goals, structures and ways of operation are just that — a description of <u>our</u> program and of some of the ways <u>we</u> operate. Certainly, this description is not intended as either a direct or implied criticism of other schools or programs, and we hope no such inferences will be drawn.

History of the Alternative Program

Our program dates at least as far back as January 1972, when a committee appointed by the Superintendent began a study of year-round education for the State College Area School District. That committee included students, staff, and citizens of the district.

The committee made a final report on year-round education in July 1972 but the report ended up on the back burner. The school board requested the administration remain alert for the availability of state funds for a feasibility study.

Dr. Robert Campbell, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, prepared a statement outlining a suggested model for an alternative secondary school which might operate on a year-round basis. That idea for an alternative school was an outgrowth of dialogue among staff over a period of several years. The alternative concept was discussed further with various staff members and principals and a presentation on the subject was made to the school board in November 1972. The board encouraged the administration to start a serious study of the alternative secondary school concept.

Early in 1973, the school district received a $15,000 grant from the state Department of Education for a study. Staff of the school district were offered an opportunity to serve on a task force to study the feasibility of implementing a model alternative school in the district. Some 56 staff members volunteered to work on the study.

Work began in March 1973. The committee discovered and reported to the school board that, even though many parents, students, and staff were pleased with existing school programs, there was "considerable support" for many key concepts in the alternative idea, such as using many parts of the community as classrooms, counseling teams, and giving students more responsibility in planning their own educational experiences. It was noted that the school district had been implementing a continuous-progress program in elementary schools and that it might be good to "articulate" the secondary program with the elementary experience.

A final report of details on implementing such an alternative school was worked out by the committee from September 1973 to January 1974 and presented to the school board. It recommended the board start up an alternative secondary program for the 1974-75 school year. The board responded favorably, establishing the Alternative Program under its own governing structure, separate from the regular junior and senior highs but cooperating with them, with first classes in grades 9-12 in the fall of 1974.

Many students, parents and interested citizen volunteers had worked with school staff members in the implementation study. The program enrolled more than 120 students in its first year.

In their August 1976 meeting, the State College Area Board of Education granted permission for the Alternative Program to be operated on a continuing basis.

Philosophy

While a statement of philosophy has never been developed formally, certain basic assumptions underlie our approach to learning. They may be summarized as follows:

human beings have a natural potentiality for learning;

when free to do so, human beings will act in ways that are life-enhancing to themselves and others;

much significant learning is acquired through doing;

much significant learning occurs when the subject matter is perceived by the learner as having relevance for his/her own purposes;

learnings which directly involve the self-concept of the learner occur most often in an atmosphere of acceptance, trust, and respect;

learning occurs most readily when the learner participates responsibly in the learning process;

self-initiated learning which involves the whole learner (feelings as well as intellect) is the most lasting and pervasive:

not all learners learn the same things in the same way at the same time.

Certain other beliefs regarding the relationships between and among students, parents, teachers, the program itself, and the community are also basic aspects of Alternative Program philosophy. Among these beliefs are the following:

people affected by decisions should have a voice in making them;

the student, parents, and staff, working cooperatively, can best develop an appropriate program for each learner;

flexibility and an openness to change are crucial to the growth and evolution of the Alternative Program;

the resources of the community far exceed those of the school, and should be utilized as often as is possible and appropriate;

those artificial barriers which often exist between school and community, adolescent and adult, parent and teacher, and teacher and learner inhibit learning and should be removed whenever possible.

Goals

The actual design of the Alternative Program is based on thirteen goals which were developed when the program was initiated in 1974. While the emphasis on certain goals may vary from year to year at both a program-wide and an individual level, the goals themselves remain unchanged.

1) The Alternative Program will provide and encourage opportunities for students to establish their own goals and to accept individual responsibility for the design and conduct of their own learning program.

2) The Alternative Program will offer a range of courses from which students may elect a program specifically designed to meet their own needs, interests, abilities, and learning styles.

3) The Alternative Program will meet the curriculum regulations established by the Department of Education.

4) The Alternative Program will make certain that students are competent in the survival skills.

5) The Alternative Program will be based in one of the school district buildings but will consider the whole community as a learning laboratory by making use of both public and private facilities.

6) The Alternative Program will employ a differentiated staff and in addition will utilize the talents of members of the whole community on a contract or volunteer basis.

7) The Alternative Program will operate at optimum economic efficiency by meeting the defined educational needs currently not being met through a full use of community resources, district resources and facilities, and by offering a program with broader-based alternatives.

8) The Alternative Program shall provide all students with equal opportunities to learn what they need to learn, when they need to learn it, in an environment that is congenial to learning.

9) The Alternative Program will involve students in the determination of school policies, procedures, and governance.

10) The Alternative Program will allow students to meet the state-mandated attendance requirements through a flexible time schedule which can be arranged to meet the educational, recreational, and employment needs and desires of the individual student.

11) The Alternative Program will provide a guidance program utilizing professional counselors, teachers, and members of the community to help students with their educational programs, personal goals, and personal matters.

12) The Alternative Program will provide for the participation of each student in a three phase career education module.

13) The Alternative Program will involve every student in some form of community service.

Program Governance and Decision Making

The Alternative Program is a part of the State College Area School District, and must comply with school board policies and with the school code, as do other schools in the district. Under the present form of governance in the Alternative Program, the Director has the final authority for making all decisions not covered by board policy or the school code. On the surface, this appears to be the conventional means of operating an educational program.

An integral part of Alternative Program philosophy, however, is the belief that the program is a cooperative effort among students, parents, and staff. This belief, more than any other, is probably at the heart of the A.P. Since its inception, the A.P. has included students and parents, as well as staff, in the decision-making process. This has been done for several reasons:

- a conviction that individuals should have a voice in all the important areas of their lives

- a recognition that participation in the making of important decisions - and realizing that very real consequences to themselves and to others follow from those decisions - can be an invaluable learning experience to students

- a belief that students and parents can make important contributions which generally result in better decisions, ones which are more genuinely reflective of the sense of the A.P. community

- a knowledge that participation in decision making usually leads to better understanding and to increased loyalty and support once a decision is made.

The Alternative Program uses several methods of involving its members in making decisions. The official and ongoing means of doing this is through the Advisory Council, which is made up of eighteen members of the A.P. community: nine students, five parents, three staff, and the Director, who is a nonvoting member. Elections are held yearly. The Council advises the Director on policy, guidelines, and the needs of the program, and helps in the implementation of decisions.

The Advisory Council meets the first Thursday of every month at 7:00. All A.P. community members are encouraged to attend, observe, and participate in the discussions.

Alternative program members are often involved in other decision-making activities as well. All-School Meetings will be scheduled on a regular basis during the school day to enable us to make effective use of this forum. In addition, when critical decisions must be made, a series of open meetings for students, parents, and staff may be held to secure widespread involvement, much as has been done in the past. Clumps will also be used to discuss matters of concern to the program, and special committees will be created as the need arises.

Kinds of Students

The Alternative Program is composed of a heterogeneous group of young people representing a cross section of the students in the State College Area School District. The program has enrolled and succeeded with all kinds of students. In terms of academic abilities, some A.P. students have ranked in the top five percent of their class and have been National Merit Finalists, while some students have been failing before entering the program.

Insofar as interests, abilities, maturity, enthusiasm, and most other personal attributes are concerned, A.P. students fall within the same wide range as students in other secondary schools in the district.

Enrollment

Any State College Area School District student in grades nine through twelve who has parental permission to do so may enroll in the Alternative Program. Students will normally enter at the beginning of a school year, although it is possible to enroll during an academic year. The time of entry during the school year will be determined by the Director.

Students interested in the program are urged to have a serious discussion of its pros and cons with their parents, then talk with their junior or senior high guidance counselor and with an A.P. staff member.

If the number of students applying for admission to the Alternative Program exceeds 200, new

students will be chosen by lottery. Once admitted to the program, a student is usually free to stay until graduation from high school.

Student Commitment

By enrolling in the program, the student agrees to stay in the program for the full school year.

Under very unusual extenuating circumstances, a student may transfer from the Alternative Program back to his/her home school after consultation with his/her counseling team. A student re-enrolling in his/her home school would enroll as a student new to the community.

By enrolling in the Alternative Program, the student agrees to work toward his/her own personal goals and help the program meet its goals.

Parent Commitment

Parents of students enrolled in the Alternative Program are committed to help their son or daughter work toward his/her own personal goals. Parents also are committed to help the program meet its goals.

Parents are encouraged to take active roles as volunteer leaders, teachers, counselors, aides, and so on, in the A.P.

The strongest commitment of all by parents is to work to help plan and guide their son's or daughter's educational program through the counseling team. Each student has his/her own

counseling team composed of, among others, at least one of his/her parents. The counseling team role for the parent is central to the idea behind the Alternative Program.

Also very important for parent commitment is the governing structure -- the Advisory Council and its committees -- through which parents have the ability to exercise a large measure of influence over the quality and kind of educational experiences presented to their sons and daughters.

Staff

The staff of the Alternative Program operates on the same pupil-teacher ratio as the rest of the secondary schools in the State College Area School District. That means, with 200 students, we would have eleven teaching positions, one counselor, and one administrator on our salaried staff.

The teaching staff of the A.P. includes full-time, salaried staff and many volunteers who offer instruction in special areas, often at their places of work.

Full-time staff members have many duties, including counseling team meetings which continue through the school year, coordination of community service projects, developing career educational experiences, coordinating the volunteer teachers, helping students find community resources needed for their educational programs, personal counseling, and creating and teaching courses.

Counseling Teams

At the heart of each student's program is his/her counseling team, composed of the student, one or both parents, a staff member, and often a community member knowledgeable in a career or academic field of interest to the student.

The general purpose of the counseling team is to attend to the growth and learning of the student. While the focus of the counseling team may be the student's academic program, very often the counseling team meetings provide an opportunity for the family to discuss the student's general goals, motivations, feelings about his/her experiences, view of the world, and so on. Students, parents, and staff often find counseling team meetings one of the most stimulating and enjoyable aspects of the Alternative Program.

Counseling teams usually meet at least four times a year, once before each cycle and at the end of the year. Specific work of the counseling team includes:

- helping the student identify and specify his/her own educational and career goals.
- helping the student consider post-high school plans.
- deciding among grade options.
- planning community service.
- planning career internship experiences.

- selecting courses of study.

- determining class schedules.

Clumps

Each staff member serves as an advisor to ten to fifteen students. These students and the staff member constitute a clump. (We had these groups of people all together without a name, so . . . .) Clumps are, in a sense, the student's "home" within the A.P., the one group which remains constant throughout the year.

Clumps serve two major purposes: to provide opportunities for regular individual counseling, with special attention to academic performance; and to provide opportunities for shared experiences, which are usually not related to academic matters. Clump meetings, held regularly throughout the year, also serve as an important forum for discussing schoolwide concerns.

Community Service

Service to one's community - helping to provide a needed service to the community without expecting or receiving payment - has traditionally been an important part of a responsible adult's role in our society, and is something the Alternative Program wishes to foster in its students. Consequently, each student in the A.P. is encouraged to participate in a community service experience sometime during his/her membership in the program. In addition to being a part of the adult role students will soon be assuming, community service can be an

important learning experience in itself, and is one way for students to give something of themselves back to the community which is providing their education.

Students are encouraged to discuss the possibilities for community service during their counseling team meetings.

Career Education

Career education is an integral part of the Alternative Program. Through course work, counseling, and career education internship experiences, students are helped systematically to evaluate their interests, values, and abilities and to learn sound career decision-making skills.

Students are helped in selecting relevant and appropriate career internships in the community where they are able to observe, and later to participate in, a career area of their choosing.

The purpose of a career internship is to provide the student with first-hand relevant information about, and experience in, occupations s/he is considering.

School Calendar

Although our school days and weeks follow flexible time schedules, the Alternative Program has the same general calendar as the rest of the school district. Vacations are the same. The program is not a year-round school at this time, although independent study contracts might be arranged for the summer months with individual teachers.

The A.P. will provide students and parents with a calendar for each of its three cycles, and it will indicate school district early dismissal days and holidays, as well as special dates for A.P. activities. We will feel free to make occasional and minor changes in our schedule as unforeseen circumstances or special opportunities arise (one of the advantages of describing ourselves as flexible), but will notify students and parents of any changes as far in advance as possible.

Sex Fairness

All courses and activities in the Alternative Program are open to both females and males, as has been true since the program's beginning.

Graduation Requirements

Students in the Alternative Program must earn the same number of credits and meet the same requirements for graduation as all other students in the school district. Upon graduation, students receive a State College Area High School diploma. (Although students receive their diploma at the conventional commencement exercises, we do have our own end-of-year celebration to say good-bye to seniors.)

The high school is a three-year high school, so students do not earn credit toward graduation in ninth grade. All ninth grade students, however, must successfully complete a planned program in the following areas: English, social studies, math, science, health, and physical education. At the A.P., a "planned program" usually means doing work in each of these areas each cycle, although

the specific activities or courses will be decided upon by each student's counseling team. In addition, students have the opportunity to study in other areas, such as art and foreign languages.

To graduate, each student must earn a minimum of thirteen credits. Nine of them must be distributed as follows:

3 credits in English
3 credits in social studies
1 credit in math
1 credit in science
½ credit in health
½ credit in physical education

The remaining four credits may be earned in art, foreign language, music, industrial arts, votech, by doing additional work in the required areas, or in virtually any activity that the Director approves as an appropriate learning activity worthy of academic credit.

Thirteen credits is the minimum number required for graduation, and most students will have ample time to earn more credits during their high school career.

Ways to Earn Credit

Students in the program are able to earn credit for courses taken in any of four ways:

- selecting courses from the catalog of courses maintained by the program;

- doing an independent contract

- enrolling in a course at the student's home school;

- or, enrolling in a course at The Pennsylvania State University.

Grading Choices

Students are permitted to select either of these methods of having their progress reported:

letter grade

pass-fail

Progress reports are given to students at the end of each course or three times a year in year-long courses.

College Entrance

Alternative Program students have experienced no special problems gaining admission to colleges and universities. The Pennsylvania State University treats a graduate from the Alternative Program on an equal basis with students from the traditional senior high school program when they are evaluated for admission to Penn State. Admissions procedures at other colleges and universities are similar to those at Penn State.

All A.P. graduates who have desired to continue their education have been accepted by a college, university, or specialized training school, and most have been accepted by the school of their first choice.

Selecting the letter grade method of evaluation at the A.P. generally simplifies the college admissions process, but it is by no means necessary to receive strictly letter grades if one wishes to attend college. If a student receives few or no letter grades, however, s/he will be encouraged to take a standardized achievement test in the major subject areas prior to making application to a college or university. The achievement tests will be in addition to the SAT scores normally required by colleges and universities. At the student's request, the achievement test scores will become a part of the official transcript submitted to a college or university.

Vo-Tech

Alternative Program students may participate in the Vocational-Technical School.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Alternative Program students are eligible to participate in extra-curricular activities in the junior or senior high school on the same basis as students in the home schools.

A.P. students are encouraged to start clubs and organizations, or organize other extra-curricular activities at the A.P. whenever there is sufficient interest.

Budget

The cost of educating each student in the Alternative Program has not exceeded the per-pupil expenditure of the other secondary schools in the State College Area School District during any of the program's years of operation.

Transportation

Students in the Alternative Program may use existing school district transportation systems to and from home.

Students and staff are encouraged to walk, bike, use car pools, use private cars, or use the Centre Area Transit System.

The Alternative Program is not responsible for providing transportation except in particular cases such as field trips.

Lunch

The following lunch options are available to A.P. students:

- lunches may be brought from home;
- brown bag lunches may be purchased from the school district;
- local restaurants may be used;
- lunches may be eaten at home.

Student Responsibilities

In the Spring of 1979, the Advisory Council, All-School Meeting, and staff cooperatively developed a statement on student responsibilities. The responsibilities listed below are viewed by the Alternative Program as minimal responsibilities (mostly common sense) for all A.P. students. Enrollment in the program is considered an explicit agreement on the part of the student to accept these responsibilities:

- come prepared to participate in counseling team meetings. (This means the student will have read the catalogue and any other pertinent material, and have some idea of what s/he would like to learn and how s/he would like to learn it, and that s/he has examined some alternative modes of learning — using the community, seminars, independent contracts, the Free University, for example.)

- make and keep counseling appointments;

- attend class regularly;

- attend clump meetings;

- maintain some sort of social responsibility toward the maintenance and/or growth of the A.P.;

- abide by policies and procedures developed for the operation and maintenance of the A.P.

At each counseling team meeting, the counseling team will review the degree to which the student is meeting his/her responsibilities. A student not meeting one or more of these responsibilities will be given one cycle to change his/her behavior so that all responsibilities are met. Except in extenuating circumstances, students not meeting their responsibilities will not be permitted to remain in the program.

SECTION II

Note:

This section contains all the procedures and the one policy that the Alternative Program has put in writing. The procedures are intended to contribute the the effective and efficient operation of the program. Most of them have been developed over the years by the staff, usually with minimal involvement of students and parents.

At another level ("higher," I guess), a drug policy was developed in 1977-78 as a result of a request by some students and staff. All A.P. students, parents, and staff had several opportunities to become involved in the discussions which preceded and followed the writing of the policy. The policy was then adopted by the Advisory Council, which recommended that it become the official policy of the Alternative Program, which it has.

The development of the drug policy generated some discussion about the need for or purposes of policies in the A.P., where we are generally much less formal in our operations. In a letter to A.P. members, I attempted to explain the reasons for policies; that letter is included in this section in the hope that it may help to answer questions that others may have.

R.L.

Attendance

Enrollment in a course is viewed as a commitment on the part of the student to attend classes. Students are expected to attend all classes (on time, of course), and staff members are expected to keep attendance records.

Occasionally, students will be faced with two or more conflicting activities. A student may be excused from a class or other activity only through making arrangements with the instructor prior to missing the class or activity.

When a student is ill, a written excuse signed by a parent or guardian is required. This should be shown to instructors whose classes were missed, and should then be given to Barbara in the office. This should be done the day the student returns to school.

Because class attendance is so important, there are some serious consequences attached to unexcused absences. First, three unexcused absences a cycle from a course can, at the discretion of the instructor, be made the basis for a failing mark. Such absences may also result in the filing of a first offense notice with law enforcement officials.

Both those steps are drastic, and no one wants to see either step taken. When a student has an attendance problem, some or all of the following steps will be taken:

- the individual teacher and the clump leader may talk with the student about the problem. When appropriate, the counselor will be consulted.

- the director will become involved, and will have an individual conference with the student to discuss the concerns.

- the clump leader will notify the parents and ask for their help in working with the student.

- a counseling team meeting will be called, and plans will be made to deal with the situation.

- parents will be informed of the possible legal consequences and of the involvement of the home and school visitor.

If attendance problems continue, one of two steps may be taken:

- the student and his/her parents may feel that a solution is impossible and request that the student leave the program and return to his/her home school. The date of return, except under extenuating circumstances, will be at the end of a semester or a school year. The Director will be responsible for negotiating a transfer at times other than the end of the school year.

- the staff may feel that a solution to the attendance problem is unrealistic and that it would be to the student's detriment to remain in the program. In this case, the staff will recommend that the Director approve the transfer of the student back to the home school. The date of return, except under extenuating circumstances, will be at the end of a semester

or a school year. The Director will be responsible for negotiating a transfer at times other than the end of the school year.

Classes at Home Schools

Most students at the Alternative Program, at one time or another, choose to take a course in what we call their "home" school (that is, the school they would be attending if there were no A.P.). The A.P. encourages this practice whenever it is appropriate for the student to do so, and especially when the A.P. cannot offer a similar experience.

The staff has found, however, that students who take several courses at a home school are seriously hampered in their ability to participate fully in the Alternative Program. It should be understood that the Alternative Program is more than a collection of courses. Among other things, it represents a shared commitment to common goals, to exploring a variety of learning modes, to involvement in all aspects of the program's operation, to participating in the full range of A.P. activities. Because lengthy, daily commitments to classes in other schools limit the ability of students to experience fully the richness of the Alternative Program, a limit has been placed on the number and kinds of classes students may take at their home schools. In scheduling classes at home schools, three guidelines will be observed:

- courses taken must have the approval of the counseling team;
- a student may register for a course in his/her home school when no comparable

experience is available through the Alternative Program;

- a student may register for a maximum of ten class periods a week in his/her home school.

Exceptions to these guidelines will, of course, be made in appropriate circumstances. Any such exceptions must be recommended by the counseling team and approved by the Director.

Schedule Changes

One of the counseling team's important tasks is to help the student formulate an appropriate schedule. After a student's schedule has been planned and approved by the counseling team, changes will not normally be made for several reasons:

- students entering courses late have to play "catch up"

- students dropping a course but not adding another often end up carrying a light load one cycle and overloading themselves the next cycle

- class schedules are planned and sometimes modified with the needs of particular students in mind

- many courses have class size limitations which are often important factors in planning or offering a course

- some students may be "closed out" of courses by other students who later wish to drop the course.

Even though students and counseling teams plan schedules carefully, it is occasionally necessary or desirable to make changes in schedules. When schedule changes must be made, the following two guidelines will be observed:

- all schedule changes must have counseling team approval, which means that another counseling team meeting will usually be held. At the very least, the parents and the clump leader will discuss the matter directly.

- after two weeks of classes, a course may be dropped only with the permission of the Director, following a meeting of the student, course instructor, clump leader, and Director. Such late permission to drop a course will be granted only rarely and only under highly extenuating circumstances.

Repeating Courses

Occasionally, a student may wish to repeat a course s/he has already taken and for which s/he has received credit. In most circumstances, the student will be permitted to repeat a course under the conditions listed below.

(Courses which a student has taken and failed, or from which s/he has withdrawn, are not considered "repeat" courses and may be taken in the same manner as any other course a student has not taken. Both grades will be used in computing honor points and class rank.)

Eligibility

1. A student repeating a course may do so on a space-available basis.

2. Courses may be repeated only with the counseling team approval.

Credit

1. No student may receive double credit for a course; that is, no additional credit will be given for a course which is repeated.

2. When a course has the same title, but the course content or process is sufficiently varied so that essentially new learning experiences are available to the student, additional credit will be granted for the course at the recommendation of the instructor and with the approval of the Director. Recommendation and approval must occur prior to the beginning of the course. The student's transcript will indicate that the course is essentially different from the earlier course. (Example: Creative Writing II)

Grades/Transcripts

The course title will appear twice on the student's transcript.

If the course was taken originally at the Alternative Program, the first grade for the course will be placed in parentheses, no credit will be granted, and the grade will not be used in computing honor points or class rank. The second course will be marked "(repeat)", credit will be granted, and the grade received will be used in computing honor points and class rank.

If the course was taken originally at another school, the repeated course will be marked on the transcript as a "(repeat)" and the grade placed in parentheses. No credit will be given and the grade will not be used in computing honor points or class rank.

Independent Contracts

Independent contracts provide a means of broadening significantly the learning options available to students. Since contracts afford each student the opportunity to work with some of the many talented, skilled, and informed people in our community, and to experience a new and often exciting way of learning, we encourage each student to try at least one independent contract during his/her stay in the Alternative Program. At the same time, students and parents should recognize that a student working on an independent contract will be expected to assume much greater responsibility for his/her own learning than s/he normally does when enrolled in a course. The information which follows may be helpful to students considering an independent contract.

Although independent contracts may be started at any time (with the permission of the counseling team), it is almost always more convenient and sensible to start at the beginning of a cycle.

Every contract must be signed by the student, a parent or guardian, the clump leader, the A.P. staff person granting credit, and the resource person (there are places on the independent contract form for all these signatures). Since this often

takes some time, students are encouraged to begin early to make arrangements for independent contracts.

Contracts may be for any length of time, but our experience (after doing hundreds of contracts) suggests that it is usually not practical or desirable to plan to do a contract in less than one cycle's time (ten to twelve weeks) if the student is carrying a normal load.

To assist students in managing their time and to help assure an appropriate learning experience, staff members will frequently set various deadlines on independent contracts for such matters as writing and signing the contract, handing in certain portions of work, conferences, completion dates, and so on. While these dates at times seem capricious, they hardly ever are. They are set for two reasons: to help students have successful experiences, and to make it possible for the staff to keep tabs on what everyone is doing so people and things don't get lost in the shuffle.

Independent contracts are intended to help students design and carry out planned learning experiences. It makes sense, therefore, to expect that contracts will be agreed upon and signed before work is begun, or within a couple of weeks of starting. Only in rare instances will a contract be written and credit granted after the fact, and then only with the Director's approval. Students who want credit for something they are doing should make arrangements beforehand.

Student Travel and Vacations

The Alternative Program recognizes that travel experiences, including family vacations, may provide important or unique learning opportunities for students, and we encourage students to take advantage of such opportunities as they arise. We especially encourage travel experiences when they can be related to the student's planned educational program, and are willing to assist in arranging for such travel when appropriate. When students travel during a cycle, however, it is important that satisfactory arrangements regarding coursework are made prior to the travel experience. It is the responsibility of the student and his/her parents to see that this is done. The following suggestions are offered to assist travelers in meeting their obligations to the program.

1. If a student knows at the beginning of a cycle that s/he will miss classes because of travel, special care should be taken when selecting courses. Each cycle, certain courses are offered which are primarily discussion courses, and it is not often possible to earn credit in such a course if the student is absent for two or more weeks.

2. Students should notify teachers as far in advance of an absence for travel as possible and make arrangements to complete the work which will be missed.

3. As often as possible, coursework to be missed should be completed prior to the student's absence. Only rarely should it be necessary for work to be made up after the travel experience.

To help insure that necessary preparations have been made prior to the student's travel/vacation, a counseling team meeting should be held

prior to the student's absence. At this meeting, the counseling team will review the student's assignments and responsibilities regarding course-work. It is the student's responsibility to turn in all work as soon as possible after his/her return, but no later than five school days after s/he returns to school.

Extended Field Trips

Several times during the school year, students will have the opportunity to participate in extended field trips (that is, experiences which include an overnight stay). Participation in such trips - for instance, backpacking trips, attending conferences, river trips, visiting New York City, skiing in Vermont - is encouraged, since such trips frequently provide experiences which cannot be replicated in normal, day-to-day activities of the school.

Participating in such intensive experiences carries with it, however, certain responsibilities and requires special planning. Several guidelines have been developed regarding extended field trips:

1. Each student must have parental approval, in writing, to participate in an extended field trip. Whenever possible, trips will be scheduled and announced at the beginning of each cycle, which will enable each student to decide about participation during his/her counseling team meeting.

2. Since such trips depend upon the cooperation of everyone involved, and since plans are

often based upon a certain number of participants, each student who signs up for a trip must accept the responsibility to go if chosen. Students who drop out of a trip after the first organizational meeting may receive an "E" for any credit assigned to the trip.

3. Each student must make arrangements with all instructors, including those in the home school, prior to the trip. (Please read the section in this handbook on "Student Travel and Vacations," page 27.)

4. Because space is often limited on such trips, no student should depend upon an extended field trip for required credit in any area.

5. Inappropriate behavior on an extended field trip may be grounds for excluding a student from participating in future trips.

6. Each student will be expected to provide his/her own food and equipment on an extended field trip.

7. Staff members who are leading an extended field trip may set up additional requirements for a particular trip. For instance, students on a river trip must:

successfully swim 100 yards, fully clothed;

successfully complete canoe instruction or demonstrate abilities;

successfully complete a warm-up run in Class II water.

Credit for Service Learning

Students may earn academic credit by successfully completing an approved Service Learning Project. In most cases, 1/6 credit will be awarded for a Service Learning Project when a student has met the following criteria:

1. development of a written contract between the student and the community agency or individual involved, approved by the Coordinator of Community Resources;

2. at least twenty hours of contact time on the site;

3. attendance at a bimonthly seminar for the duration of the contract (in cases of a project lasting less than six weeks, special arrangements must be made with the Coordinator regarding seminar participation;

4. bimonthly self-evaluations turned in to the seminar leader;

5. validation by the community contact person that the student has met agreed-upon responsibilities.

Renewal of a worthwhile activity for additional credit is possible. Credit will be granted in a specific subject area with the approval of the subject area teacher. Letter grades will not be given for Service Learning Projects.

(Advisory Council, December, 1978)

Jobs

As a program, we recognize that students may realize important learnings from holding part-time jobs in the community. At the same time, we feel that such learnings may also be derived from other kinds of experiences, such as career internships, community service, and other service learning activities. We feel, also, that students who hold jobs may be denied other kinds of planned educational experiences because of the demands of their jobs. For these reasons, the decision to hold a job shall be made only after careful consideration of the student's overall program.

The counseling team shall have the responsibility for deciding to include a job as part of the student's planned program each cycle. In those instances when not all members of the counseling team can agree that holding a job is an appropriate activity for the student, the director or another staff member will work with the counseling team to resolve the disagreement.

When a job is held during what the school district views as "normal" school hours (8:30-3:30), the director must inform the Pupil Personnel Services that the student has Alternative Program approval for the job. It is the student's responsibility to see that this is done prior to beginning the job.

(Advisory Council, November, 1978)

Letter About Policies

25 October 1977

To All Members of the Alternative
Program Community:

Some of the purposes of policies, about drugs or anything else, are to translate philosophy into practice, to set limits, and to provide direction to those of us who are expected to do something when limits are exceeded. Policies also serve to let people know ahead of time what the consequences are likely to be when limits are exceeded. So long as policies enhance understanding, serve the larger interests of the program, and remain flexible enough to allow for diverse circumstances, I believe they may be useful to the continued growth of the Alternative Program.

From my discussions about drugs with students, staff, and parents, and from my own thinking about the matter of drug policy, it seems to me that there are three major questions which need to be considered whenever there is a matter of concern within the Alternative Program.

1. How does this matter affect the learning and growth of Alternative Program students as a group?

2. How does this matter affect the learning and growth of individual students within the A.P. whose needs or interests at a certain time or in particular circumstances may differ in significant ways from the needs or interests of the majority of students?

3. How does this matter affect the total well-being of the Alternative Program itself?

(This question includes a wide range of considerations, such as levels of parent involvement in and commitment to the program; the strengths, weaknesses, needs, and interests of staff; the available resources of the community; local, state, and federal laws; the program's relationship to the rest of the school district; community perception of the program; and so forth.)

It seems to me that Alternative Program decisions and policies should, insofar as possible, reflect a balance among the answers to these three questions. Because circumstances will vary widely, it also seems critical that policies have built-in flexibility, and that decisions never be "cast in concrete." It is with these concerns in mind that the policy which follows has been developed.

Sincerely,

Rick

Richard J. Lear
Program Director

Drug Policy

Introduction

The use and abuse of drugs in our society is widespread by any measure, and the development of a more sensible approach to drug use is sorely needed. It is also a task which is beyond the scope of the Alternative Program community. The A.P. community does, however, have a responsibility to attend to the learning and growth of its members, particularly those who are, by law and custom, designated as students. Part of that responsibility is to state as clearly as possible

the conditions under which growth and learning may be enhanced or hindered.

It is our belief as a learning community that the use of drugs which alter consciousness - that is, which make the user euphoric, depressed, high, stoned, drunk, and so on - does not help learning. Such use, which may be legally or socially acceptable under other circumstances, is inappropriate during school and school-related activities, and is, in fact, an example of drug abuse. As a community, we feel a shared responsibility to minimize or eliminate drug abuse. This policy, developed by students, parents, and staff, is a description of some steps we are taking in that direction.

It should be understood that this policy is in no way comprehensive, that it describes only certain aspects of our approach to drugs and their use. What follows are essentially remedial aspects of a comprehensive policy; the preventive segments of this policy must still be developed or gathered together and stated explicitly.

A summary is included at the end for those who want to read an abbreviated version of the policy.

Counseling About Drugs

1. Any student who seeks counseling on a drug-related matter is assured of the following:

- the A.P. will see that the student receives counseling, either from the A.P. counselor or from an outside agency;

- no one in the program will be told of the student's problem except the A.P. counselor and, if a referral to an outside agency is made, the Director;

- parents will not be informed of the problem without the student's approval, unless the staff member involved believes there is an immediate danger to the student or others.

2. The parent(s) of any student who seeks counseling on a drug-related matter may be assured of the following:

- the A.P. will see that your child receives appropriate counseling;

- as part of the counseling, your child will be encouraged to tell you about his/her problem;

- you will be informed of any drug-related problem if a staff member believes there is an immediate danger to your child or others.

3. Any student who is concerned about another student's use or abuse of drugs may discuss the matter with a staff member and be assured of remaining unidentified to others. The staff member, who may consult with the Director or Counselor, will then discuss the matter with the student involved, if that seems appropriate.

Possession of Controlled or Illegal Substances

1. If a student is caught possessing or using a controlled or illegal substance,* the Director will be informed immediately. The Director will

*Controlled substances are defined in Act 64 of the Pennsylvania Crimes Code, and include such drugs as marijuana, hashish, cocaine, heroin, LSD, drugs requiring a prescription, and so on. (Students may use medication as prescribed by

have final responsibility for all A.P. decisions relating to the matter, although s/he may delegate certain responsibilities to other members of the A.P. community.

2. All controlled substances will be confiscated and turned over to law enforcement officials by the Director. In the case of first offenders who are caught possessing small amounts of marijuana or "chemicals," the Director will not identify the student to the police, but may do so if other controlled substances are involved. In case of two or more offenses, the Director will identify the person to the police in most instances.

3. All alcoholic substances will be confiscated and turned over to parents, except in those few instances where the Director determines that parents should not be involved.

4. The Director will discuss the matter with the Clump Leader, who will call a Counseling Team Meeting in almost every instance. The Counseling Team may be the regular members, may be expanded to include the A.P. Counselor and/or Director, or may be smaller (usually by excluding a resource person if one is a part of the Counseling Team).

5. The Counseling Team will decide what further action, if any, will be taken regarding the matter. The Counseling Team may consider such things as:

---

a physician at school so long as it does not interfere in their effective functioning.) The term "illegal substance" refers to drugs such as alcohol, which are illegal for persons under a certain age to use.

- involvement of the student and/or parents in a counseling program, either with the A.P. Counselor or with individuals or agencies not connected with the program;

- need for an educational program which will inform the student of the effects of drugs on health and learning, as well as the legal restrictions on various drugs;

- disciplinary actions which may/will be taken within the program or at home;

- identification of the student to the police;

- the consequences to the student if another drug-related incident occurs;

- the student's placement in the A.P. and his/her responsibilities to the program.

6. In those unusual incidents when the Director and Clump Leader determine that parents should not be involved, a surrogate Counseling Team will be formed, composed of the Clump Leader, the Director, and the A.P. Counselor and will carry out the responsibilities of a Counseling Team in this instance.

7. Possession of more than a small amount of a controlled or illegal substance will be treated in the same fashion as selling or dispensing drugs.

Selling or Dispensing Controlled or Illegal Substances

1. The Alternative Program community views the selling or dispensing of drugs as a more serious matter than personal possession of drugs. It suggests a lesser regard both for the learning

and growth of other A.P. students and for the general well-being of the Alternative Program itself. Consequently, in such instances, the welfare of other students and of the program itself will generally be given the greater consideration in handling the matter.

2. The Director will be informed immediately and will have final responsibility for all A.P. decisions relating to the matter.

3. All controlled substances will be confiscated and turned over to law enforcement officials and the student will be identified to the police. Whenever possible, parents will be notified in advance of the police and the matter will be handled without the presence of police at the Alternative Program.

4. The Director may suspend a student from school until a Counseling Team Meeting is held.

5. A Counseling Team Meeting will be held to consider what further action, if any, should be taken regarding the matter. The C.T. will make recommendations to the Director, who will have the final responsibility for handling the matter. The Counseling Team, and then the Director, will consider the same choices as suggested in cases of possession, although more serious consideration will usually be given to possible disciplinary action, including suspension, removal from the program, or recommendation of expulsion from school.

Non-Students

1. Any person caught possessing, using, selling, or dispensing a controlled or illegal substance at the Alternative Program and who is

not a member of the Alternative Program community, will be reported to law enforcement officials.

Being Under the Influence of Drugs

1. School and school-related activities are inappropriate places for people to be under the influence of drugs which alter consciousness (which make a person drunk, high, stoned, euphoric, etc.) because such a state does not enhance learning and may also interfere with the learning of others.

2. If it appears to a staff member that a student is under the influence of a drug, the staff member will take the student to the Director. The Director will keep the student in the office or some other appropriate area or will notify the parents and ask the parents to take the student home.

3. In most instances, a Counseling Team meeting will be held to discuss the matter. The Counseling Team may consider the same choices as suggested in cases of possession.

Summary of Drug Policy

1. DRUGS ARE NOT PERMITTED AT THE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM, so don't bring them here, and don't put them inside you and then come here.

2. If you want counseling on a drug-related matter, you will receive it - from someone on the A.P. staff or from an outside agency - and no one will know about it except those staff members who must know.

3. If you caught with drugs (small amounts) at the Alternative Program, these things will happen in the first instance:

- the drugs will be confiscated and turned over to the police. (Your name will not be given to the police, just the drugs.)

- a Counseling Team meeting will be called (almost always), and the Counseling Team will decide what else, if anything, will happen to you.

- if you are caught with hard drugs, your name will probably be given to the police along with the stuff confiscated.

4. If you are caught selling or dispensing small amounts of a drug (giving a joint to a friend is dispensing), the following things will happen:

- the drugs will be confiscated, turned over to the police, and you will be identified to the police.

- a Counseling Team meeting will be called (always), and the Counseling Team will recommend to the Director what else should happen to you. "What else" could range from nothing to recommendation of expulsion from the school district (if you are selling hard stuff).

- you might be suspended from school until the Counseling Team meeting is held.

5. Possession of more than a small amount of a drug will be treated the same as selling or dispensing.

6. Second and subsequent offenses will be dealt with similarly, but with more concern for the total program (that means the penalty part of the whole thing will be more severe.)

7. Everyone should know that there are limits, and at some point, since this program is voluntary and you could be somewhere else, you might be asked or told to leave the Alternative Program.

8. The summary of the summary is this:

If you want counseling about a drug problem, we'll help with that; but drugs are not wanted or permitted here, so don't bring them. If you do and are caught, there will be consequences, and you probably won't like them.

November, 1977